

**James Madison to Joseph Jones, November 28,
1780. Transcription: The Writings of James Madison,
ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons,
1900-1910.**

TO JOSEPH JONES.¹

1 From the Madison Papers (1840).

Philadelphia, November 28, 1780.

Dear Sir, —Yours of the eighteenth came yesterday. I am glad to find the Legislature persist in their resolution to recruit their line of the army for the war; though without deciding on the expediency of the mode under their consideration, would it not be as well to liberate and make soldiers at once of the blacks themselves, as to make them instruments for enlisting white soldiers?² It would certainly be more consonant

² The scheme of a negro bounty was discussed on several occasions in the Virginia legislature, as Jones's letters show. "But my notion is," he says in the letter to which Madison alludes, "and I think the mode would be more just and equally certain in procuring the men, to throw the militia into divisions as by the last law, and require the divisions to find a negro of a certain value or age, or money equivalent to that value * * * But the negro bounty cannot fail to procure men for the war under either scheme, with the draught as the *dernier resort*." In reply to this letter of Madison's, Jones wrote Dec. 8: "The negro scheme is laid aside upon a doubt of its practicability in any reasonable time, and because it was generally considered as unjust, sacrificing the property of a part of the community to the exoneration of the rest. It was reprobated also as inhuman and cruel. How far your idea of raising black regiments, giving them freedom would be politic, in this and the negro

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States, deserves well to be considered, so long as the States mean to continue any part of that people in their present subjection; as it must be doubtful whether the measure would not ultimately tend to increase the army of the enemy as much or more than our own. For if they once see us disposed to arm the blacks for the field they will follow the example and not disdain to fight us in our own way, and this would bring on the southern States inevitable ruin. At least it would draw off immediately such a number of the best labourers for the culture of the earth as to ruin individuals, distress the State, and perhaps the Continent, when all that can be raised by their assistance is but barely sufficient to keep us jogging along with the great expence of the war. The freedom of these people is a great and desirable object. To have a clear view of it would be happy for Virginia; but whenever it is attempted, it must be, I conceive, by some gradual course, allowing time as they go off for labourers to take their places, or we shall suffer exceedingly under the sudden revolution which perhaps arming them would produce.”— *Letters of Joseph Jones*, 48, 63, 64.

to the principles of liberty, which ought never to be lost sight of in a contest for liberty; and with white officers and a majority of white soldiers, no imaginable danger could be feared from themselves, as there certainly could be none from the effect of the example on those who should remain in bondage; experience having shewn that a freedman immediately loses all attachment and sympathy with his former fellow-slaves.

We have enclosed to the Governor a copy of an act of the Legislature of Connecticut, ceding some of their territorial claims to the United States, which he will doubtless communicate to the Assembly. They reserve the jurisdiction to themselves, and clog the cession with some other conditions which greatly depreciate it, and are the more extraordinary as their title, to the land is so controvertible a one.

The association of the merchants for fixing the depreciation seems likely to prove a salutary measure; it reduced it from 90 and 100 to 75 at once, which is its present current

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rate; although it is observed that many of the retailers elude the force of it by raising the price in hard money.